COMPUTERS / HILLEL SEGAL

Expense reports a chore no more

Touch 'n Go is such a good program, it turns the chore of compiling expense reports almost into a game.

Available for $99 from Quantic Corp., Smithtown, N.Y., Touch 'n Go is billed as a personal expense management system. It's particularly handy for managers and salespeople who travel or entertain for business.

For anyone who travels, expense reports are a fact of life. Neglecting them until the trip is a dim memory can only cost money in improper reimbursements.

With Touch 'n Go, the whole process becomes so much fun that you actually look forward to totting up your trip costs — whether it's on a lap-top computer during the trip or a desk-top model back in the office.

The program walks you through a listing of various expenses you might encounter on a business trip. Categories such as air fare, hotel, car maintenance and phone are listed at the left, with space for a week's worth of daily listings in spreadsheet form to the right. A final column lists line totals for the week, while daily totals appear at the bottom.

As you move from one day to the next to make your entries, Touch 'n Go automatically shows cumulative totals.

And it doesn't stop there. The print-out for this program is nothing short of classy. It provides a breakdown of unreimbursed expenses, expenses billed directly and advances; space for remarks from the accounting department; and a summary of company and personal tax deductibles. There's even a space for your signature, the date and an approval signature.

Segal

One of the best features is the program's ability to provide summary statements by time period, account, expense item, deductibles and even car mileage. This is great for management reporting and year-end summary reports.

And an expense account register is built in to keep track of all reports — definitely a plus at tax time.

Other nice features include:

✔ A list of expense items, codes and credit card accounts that can be easily tailored to fit your own needs. Especially handy is the built-in tax category, preset to figure deductibles in accordance with the 1986 Tax Reform Law, but easily adapted as the tax laws change.

✔ A starter box of 25 trip expense envelopes, designed to hold receipts and record pertinent information. A window on the front provides space for an expense reminder list of categories, codes and calendar.

✔ A memory-resident calculator, calendar and word processing program. Although I didn't find these as important as the expense report function, they can be useful to use on your lap-top computer when traveling. One special feature I found handy in the word processing program is a document description window that allows up to 160 characters to describe exactly what's included in your document.

On the down side, this program is a luxury that many people can do without. It may even be viewed by the accounting department as overkill, if you prepare expense reports only occasionally.

The bottom line: Touch 'n Go is fun to use and makes expense report preparation much less burdensome. I highly recommend it for anyone who needs to keep track of their travel expenses.

Hillel Segal is an independent computer consultant and author of the monthly Executive Computing Newsletter, published by the Association of Computer Users, P.O. Box 9003, Boulder 80301.